

Chapter I

Introduction

OVERVIEW

THE ROCKVILLE'S PIKE PLAN LAYS out a vision for how Rockville's portion of the Rockville Pike corridor can transform, over time, from a utilitarian retail strip with little aesthetic appeal, to a multi-use, economically vibrant and attractive area of pride for Rockville. The plan is an update to the *Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan*, which was approved and adopted into the City's Comprehensive Master Plan in 1989.

Some of the ideas that were articulated in the 1989 plan are advanced in this plan. For instance, the multi-way boulevard design recommended for the Pike formalizes a concept that has been developing incrementally for decades and better meets the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. The plan even anticipates the possibility of additional high capacity transit service along the Pike. Similarly, expansion of the street network is a recommendation of both plans; but this new plan

provides a more finely developed street network.

Rockville's Pike was launched in 2007, at about the same time that the City was initiating revisions to its zoning ordinance. Both efforts included extensive public participation. As a result, the land use recommendations in the plan reflect many of the same broad goals that are contained in the 2008 zoning ordinance for the City's mixed-use zones and establishes them even more firmly in the City's Master Plan.

Development pressures near the Twinbrook Metro station led to the decision to update the 1989 plan. The City had a desire to be more intentional and proactive in prescribing some of the urban design principles of the successful Town Square project. In addition, the City saw the need to coordinate the siting and design of private development projects and public infrastructure.

The Plan is based on a set of corridor planning principles that captures the community's vision for Rockville Pike.

The plan offers new strategies for mobility and safety improvement, place-making, and growth management along the corridor.

Whereas the 1989 plan focused on more parking near Metro, this plan focuses on adding residential uses near Metro and the need to improve walkability and access to transit that is not solely reliant on automobiles.

This plan, for example, does not significantly change the maximum development potential from regulatory levels established under the 2008 zoning ordinance. It does, however, prescribe continuity of building frontage lines, architectural features that provide visual interest and design criteria for a better pedestrian environment. Improving pedestrian conditions, an efficient land use pattern that can adjust to prevailing market conditions, the provision of public spaces, and compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods are goals of the existing mixed use zones and this plan for the Rockville Pike corridor. This plan, however, specifies the pathways to meeting these goals.

In addition to building on the best ideas of past efforts, *Rockville's Pike* offers new strategies for mobility and safety improvements, place-making, and growth management along the corridor. It addresses the form that new development will take. It considers the interaction between private development and public spaces in order to activate street life on the Pike, near the Metro station, and along key commercial corridors - yet maintain a residential environment near existing neighborhoods. The plan provides the vision to create new urban neighborhoods that become attractive places for living, working, and shopping along the Rockville Pike corridor.

This plan was produced by the Rockville Planning Commission, working from an initial draft provided by a team of consultants. It included a sequence of community meetings and workshops that began in December 2007, a series of work sessions held in 2011- 2012, and two sets of public hearings, held before and after the work sessions. It incorporates input from citizens, private and public sector leaders, government agencies, City staff, consultants, and other stakeholders. The input gathered through the *Rockville's Pike* public involvement and planning process resulted in a set of corridor planning principles that captures the community's vision for the corridor. The corridor planning principles are provided in Chapter 3.

In addition to incorporating extensive public input, *Rockville's Pike* is based on sound technical analysis. The consultant team conducted research and analysis regarding existing transportation, land use, economic, and regulatory conditions; supplemented by staff research and analysis. The research findings, outlined in Chapter 2, and described further in the supplemental research documents, were integrated into the decision-making processes.

WHY A PLAN, AND WHY NOW?

The *Rockville's Pike Plan* is a timely effort, not simply because the previous plan is more than 20 years old. Regional projections show that almost 9,000 new residents and 4,500 new jobs are expected in the Plan Area by 2040. This will account

for 40% of Rockville's population growth during that timeframe, and approximately 11% of the employment growth. Several other factors have led Rockville citizens to express their desire for change and make a new plan for the Rockville Pike corridor compelling.

1. **Problems identified in the 1989 Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan remain.** Mobility and safety issues, the appearance, function, and experience of being on the Pike, and growth management in the corridor continue to be concerns. This plan provides better accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists, formalizes the service drives of the 1989 plan into real streets, anticipates and plans for the possibility of a new form of rapid transit along the Pike, adds more street network, and provides for attractive public spaces, including parks – all of which will contribute to making this part of Rockville great.
2. **Development interest is ripening near the Twinbrook Metrorail Station.** The Twinbrook station opened in December 1984 and had been in operation for fewer than five years when the 1989 plan was adopted. Passenger boardings at the station have doubled since then.¹ Whereas the 1989 plan focused, in part, on the need for more parking near the metro station, this plan focuses on mixed use transit-oriented development near the station and the associated need to improve walkability and access to transit that is not solely reliant on automobiles.
3. **Traffic congestion will get worse as the current roadway system is close to saturation at peak periods.** Congestion will only increase as growth continues along MD 355 and as major nearby developments, including the potential for more than 17 million square feet in the White Flint area to the south, come on line.² The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' regional travel demand model indicates that projected growth by 2030, with or without any additional development within Rockville, will exhaust the capacity of the corridor beyond levels of service that are acceptable today. A new Pike design, an expanded road network, and improved transit, including the possibility of a new surface transit line along the Pike, will all help to facilitate other travel modes as well as improve traffic flow.

At present, there are few sidewalks, amenities, public places, or green spaces to define the public realm and encourage pedestrian activity.



Figure 1.1: Traffic congestion on Rockville Pike.
Source: BeyondDC

¹ Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, *Average Weekday Passenger Boardings by Station*. 1985 (2,354 average weekday boardings) compared to 2011 (4,773 average weekday boardings). <http://www.wmata.com/pdfs/planning/Historical%20Rail%20Ridership%20By%20Station.pdf>

² This reflects the build-out maximum allowed by Montgomery County's White Flint Sector Plan. Less than 100% of this total potential amount of residential and commercial development is likely to occur during the lifespan of that plan.

*Rockville's Pike
Plan Area is
approximately
two miles long.*

4. **City APFO³ standards for development review are likely to inhibit the continued redevelopment of the Pike.** Under current development review regulations, large developments, particularly those that include residential units that may generate children, are not able to be approved for portions of the corridor until additional investments in facilities are made. This issue must be addressed in ways that allow redevelopment to happen at a pace that the community envisions and in conjunction with the necessary investments in public infrastructure and services.
5. **Rockville needs to define its place in the context of competition that is coming from beyond its borders.** Rockville Pike remains an important retail destination located in a strong regional economic market with significant long-term growth potential. Despite recent nationwide economic fluctuations, high household incomes in the vicinity of the Pike point to continued long-term retail vitality; though this plan recognizes that the expansion of Web-based

retail and continued changing retail formats will challenge the Pike to remain nimble and competitive.

The Rockville community appreciates the economic significance of the Pike and its importance to the City's fiscal health, and wants to ensure that it continues to fulfill its potential. Nearby areas just outside of Rockville are re-shaping their regulatory and infrastructure environments in order to be more predictable and financeable. Rockville must also do so, in order to remain thriving, but in a manner consistent with its values.

6. **Developing a new plan for the Pike is an essential component of the process to manage change within the City as well as address pressures from development north and south of Rockville.** As shopping centers along the Pike age over time, they will inevitably redevelop. *Rockville's Pike* offers direction on how the Pike can transform itself in a manner that reflects the community's vision of a great place, distinguishable from other corridors. At



Figure 1.2: *The Pike at Congressional Plaza – a dramatic aerial snapshot of the physical character and appearance of the corridor. Source: Pictometry*

the same time, the plan is a tool for managing the impacts that external development, north and south of the Rockville's borders, will have on the City's infrastructure.

³ Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance.

7. **The appearance of the Pike is nondescript, particularly when compared to emerging regional shopping magnets. According to public comment at the outset of the planning effort, much of the built environment along the Pike is aging, bland and designed primarily to accommodate cars.** There are few attractive sidewalks, amenities, public places, or green spaces to define the public realm and encourage pedestrian activity. Public input has indicated a strong desire to seize the opportunity of this new plan to transform the corridor into an appealing and interesting place that adds to the community's character.
8. **Coordinate with RTV and White Flint boulevard plans. Since this planning effort began in 2007, Montgomery County has adopted the White Flint Sector Plan and is embarking on the White Flint 2 Sector Plan.** A County-wide Rapid Transit Vehicle system, that would likely include a route along MD 355, has been proposed. The City needs an adopted vision for its portion of Rockville Pike in order to coordinate and participate in future actions to design and fund the boulevard and transit system.

The combination of all of the above factors makes the Rockville's Pike Plan a timely and vital undertaking.

THE PLAN AREA

As shown in Figure 1.3, the Rockville Pike Plan Area includes the portion of Rockville Pike (MD 355) that is bounded on the north by Richard Montgomery Drive and on the south by the City's southern border, just north of Bou Avenue. It is 1.98 miles long.

To the north, the western boundary lies at the rear of the properties facing Rockville Pike; in the middle, it intersects the Woodmont Country Club property; to the south, it follows the eastern edge of Jefferson Street. The eastern boundary of the Plan Area is along the eastern edge of the Metrorail right-of-way. The Plan area contains approximately 382 acres (including rights-of-way).

Rockville's Town Center, including its mixed-use Town Square development, is located to the northwest, outside of the Plan Area. Montgomery County's rapidly developing White Flint area is to the southeast. The Plan Area is bordered by established neighborhoods to the east and the west.

ROCKVILLE PIKE PLAN AREAS

An examination of conditions along the Rockville Pike corridor indicates that there are differences between the south, middle, and north segments, and also between the east and west sides of the Pike. To facilitate discussion of these distinct areas, they are classified here as the South Pike, Middle Pike-West Side, North Pike-West Side, and Middle/North Pike-East Side. The different characteristics of these segments have an impact on how the plan addresses transportation and land use policies.

There are differences between the south, middle and north segments of the Pike, and between the east and west sides.

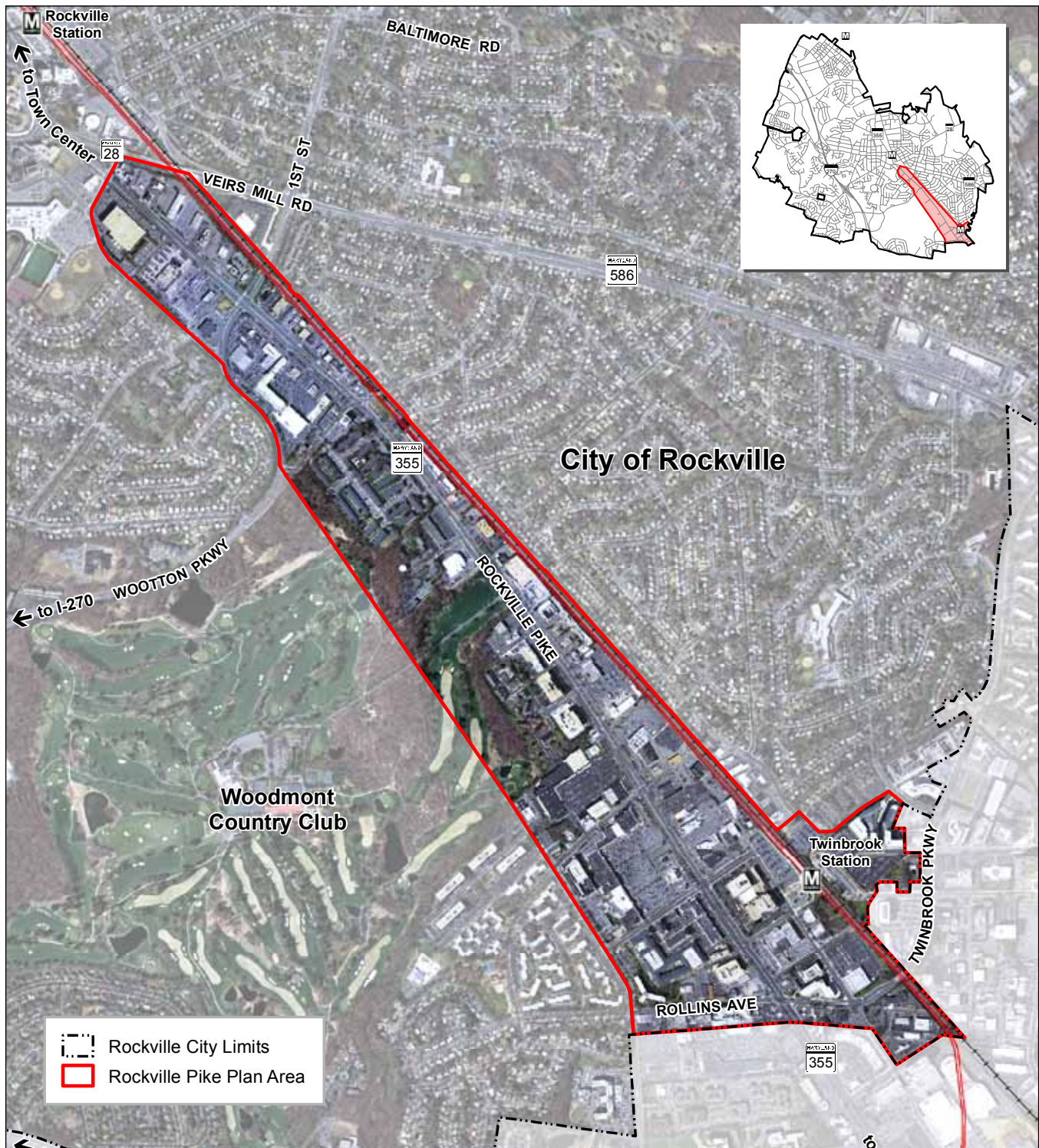


Figure 1.3: The Plan Area Boundary – Rockville Pike is surrounded by neighborhoods, but access between the Pike and the neighborhoods is limited by two major physical barriers: the Metrorail right-of-way and Woodmont Country Club

The South Pike

This section of the Plan Area is located south of Woodmont Country Club to the southern City limits (see Figure 1.5). It is bordered by East Jefferson Street to the west and the Metrorail right-of-way to the east, but also includes the portion of

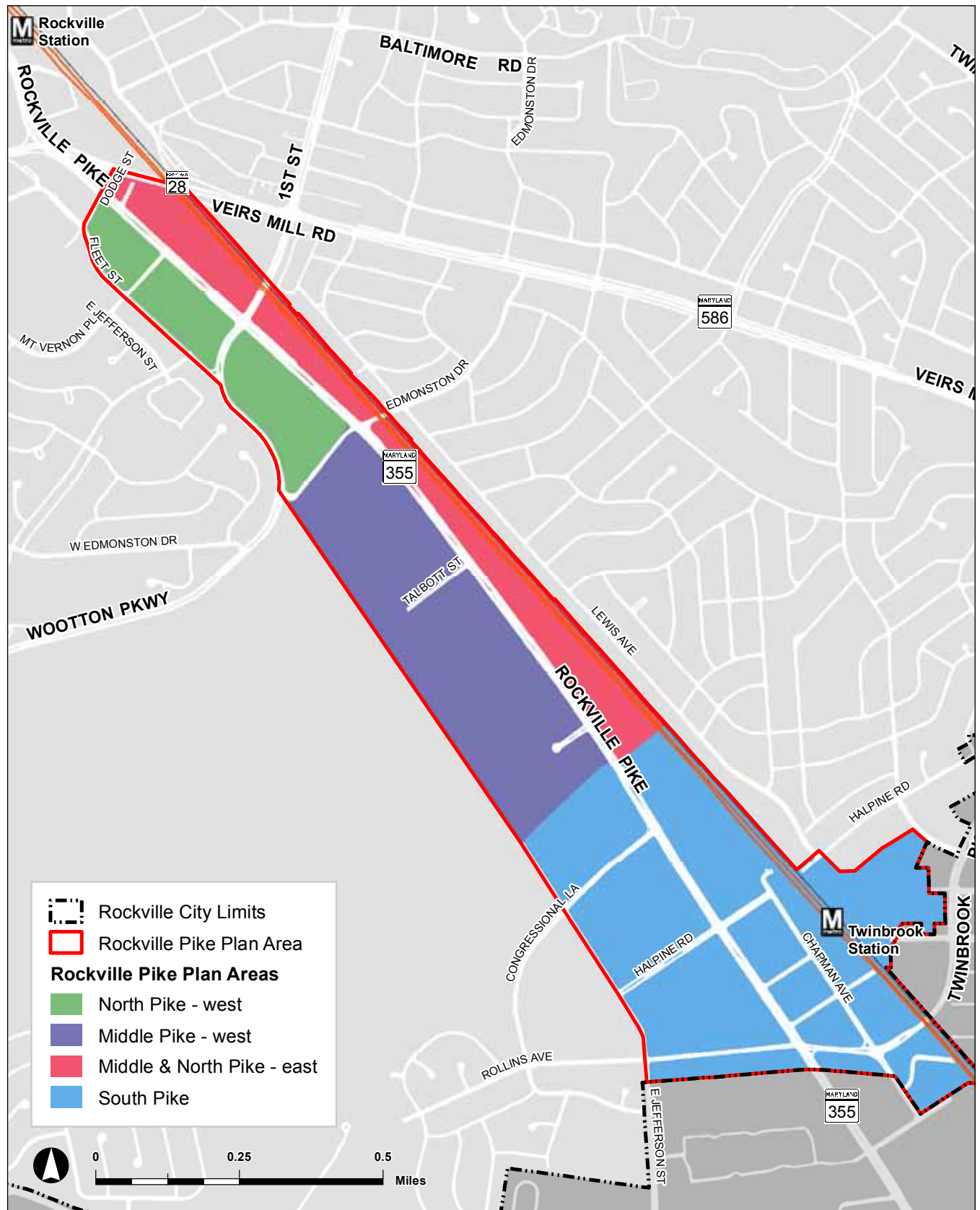


Figure 1.4: Pike Plan Area Regions

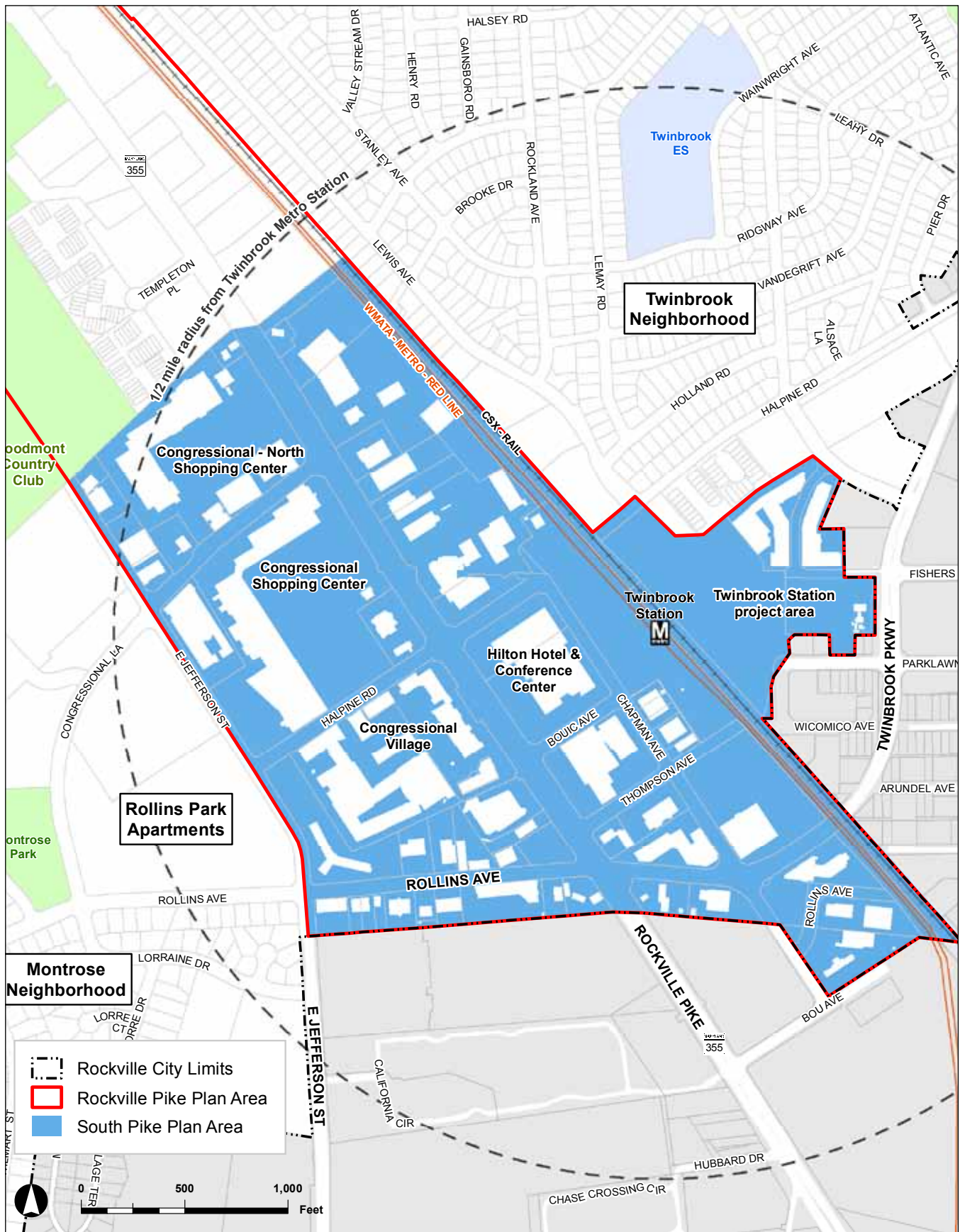


Figure 1.5: South Pike

the Twinbrook Station Planned Development that surrounds the Twinbrook Metro-rail station east of the tracks.

The South Pike has the greatest potential to receive the bulk of the population growth within the corridor, as well as a significant portion of the City's population growth, over the next few decades. This area also has the most potential to transform from a commercial suburban development pattern into an urban center, complementing Rockville Town Square to the north. Much of the growth and increased density in the South Pike is expected to be east of Rockville Pike for the near future. The following conditions and opportunities explain why growth is projected to be concentrated in the South Pike:

- Much of Montgomery County's development activity and interest is concentrated near Metrorail stations along the Red Line. A current focus is on the area surrounding the White Flint Metro Station and moving northward.
- The South Pike has good proximity to a Metrorail station. Most of this area is within one-half mile walking distance of the Twinbrook Station.
- The South Pike has a better developed street network than other parts of the corridor, but large blocks on the west side present an opportunity for further expansion of the network.
- The South Pike is the dominant retail focus of the corridor, featuring large, national retail tenants that generate the highest rents in the corridor and serve as anchors in making Rockville Pike a regional retail destination.
- Although retail is the primary market driver, multifamily residential use is emerging in the South Pike and in areas south of Rockville such as White Flint. The South Pike already features multifamily residential developments such as Congressional Village and higher density, mixed-use development around the Twinbrook Metro Station. The Twinbrook Station project, resulting from a joint development agreement between a developer and Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA, or "Metro") is already being described as a model of transit-oriented development.
- Areas of the South Pike west of Rockville Pike transition toward a mixture of housing types: mid-rise apartments that abut Woodmont Country Club; garden apartments; townhouses, and single-family homes in the Montrose neighborhood, which provide a range of prices and rents, owner-renter options, and unit sizes.

The South Pike segment will likely receive the bulk of the population growth within the corridor.

The Middle Pike - West Side

This middle portion of the corridor, west of the Pike, extending from the lot just south of Templeton Place northward to Edmonston Drive, is adjacent to Woodmont Country Club and includes the far eastern portion of the Club as well as multifamily apartments and commercial uses (see Figure 1.6). Two six-story office buildings, at 1401 and 1451 Rockville Pike, are examples of redevelopment that occurred under the 1989 Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan. Woodmont Country Club is a notable land use in the corridor and the Club's bucolic entrance on the Pike gives this section of the Plan Area a distinctive character.

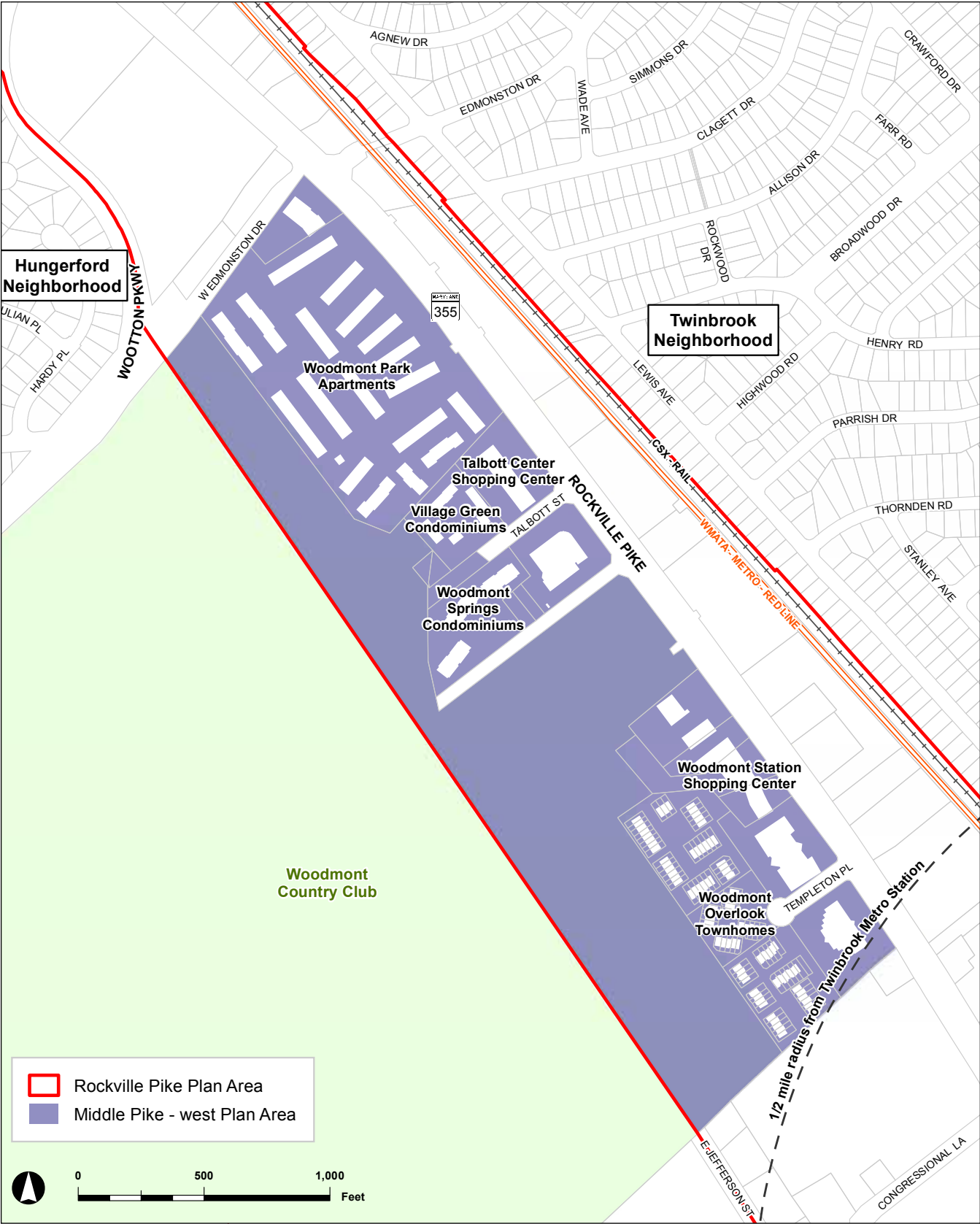


Figure 1.6: Middle Pike – West Side

This plan lays out a framework for development and infrastructure for the west side of the Middle Pike, should property owners choose to redevelop in the future.

- Currently, there are few roadway connections other than those that serve the commercial and multifamily uses that front onto the Pike north and south of the Club's entrance. The remainder of this area is occupied by the Club entrance and a portion of one of its golf courses.
- Adding street network to this area is an important plan component to accompany any major redevelopment.
- An extension of Jefferson Street northward to Wootton Parkway could be a particularly important connection for dispersing traffic within the corridor.
- This plan does not have an explicit goal of encouraging development of any portion of the Club's golf course.

The North Pike - West Side

Three large blocks comprise the west side of the North Pike (see Figure 1.7). Development is characterized by stand-alone retailers, shopping centers, automobile dealerships, and townhouse-style office space.

- Properties here generally achieve lower rents than those in the South Pike. The tenant mix includes national and local retailers and local restaurants.
- The Fleet Street unimproved right-of-way forms the western boundary of this portion of the Plan Area. The extension of Fleet Street from Mt. Vernon Place to Ritchie Parkway was a recommendation in the 1989 Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan and in the 2002 Comprehensive Master Plan and continues to be recommended in this plan.
- The North Pike is within one-half mile of the Rockville Metro Station. Pedestrian access to the Rockville station, however, is made difficult by the complex geometry of the intersection of Veirs Mill Road and Rockville Pike which hinders walking. Any reconstruction of this intersection should include pedestrian improvements, but such redesign is beyond the scope of this plan.

The Middle and North Pike - East Side

The east side of the Pike in the Middle and North portions of the corridor is wedged between the Pike and the Metrorail right-of-way (see Figure 1.8). Many of the lots are very shallow; some as narrow as 110 feet from the edge of the State highway right-of-way to the edge of the rail right-of-way.

- This area is dominated by commercial uses that exhibit lower average rents, and more independently owned and operated small businesses (as opposed to chain retailers), compared to what is more frequently found in the South Pike.
- Redevelopment here is expected to be limited by the size and configuration of the lots.
- This area is expected, in the near and intermediate term, to remain more auto-oriented than the rest of the corridor because it is less accessible to Metro and there is very little opportunity to create the type of street grid that encourages pedestrian and bicycle activity.

The different characteristics of the corridor have an impact on how the plan addresses transportation and land use.

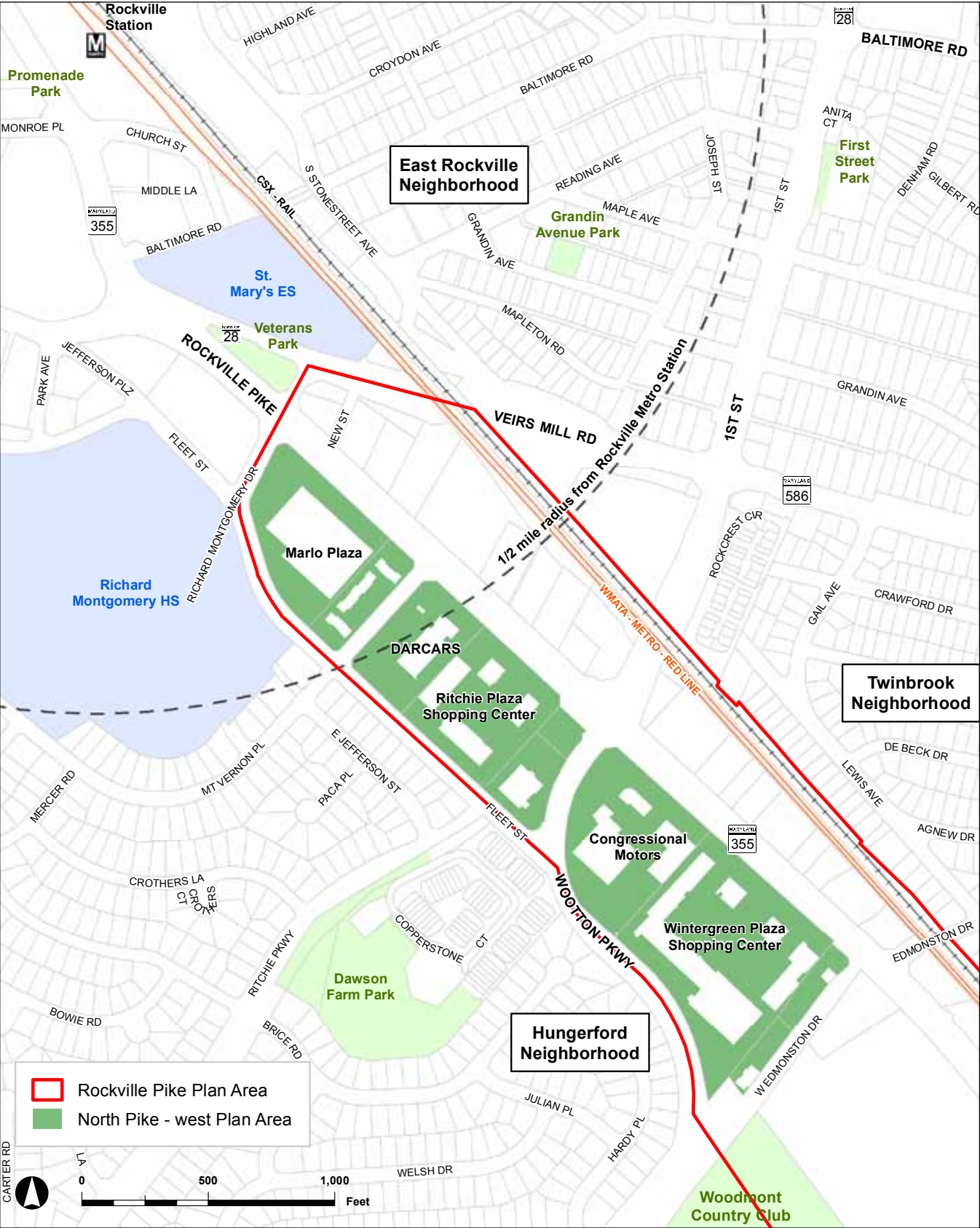


Figure 1.7: North Pike – West Side



Figure 1.8: North and Middle Pike – East Side

- This plan seeks to ensure continuing and improved viability of east side, Middle Pike properties and uses.
- For this portion of the corridor, this plan recognizes the need to support the land uses that currently exist; continue to accommodate automobile accessibility; address the real parking challenges; and acknowledge the limitations for redevelopment to significantly higher density.
- Some redevelopment could occur on the east side, especially if the west side of the Middle and North Pike is activated by redevelopment and the introduction of a more refined street network, or if a new surface transit line were to include a stop in this area.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

The *Rockville's Pike Plan* provides a comprehensive guide for understanding the public process, the research findings, the public's vision for the future of the Pike, and the policies and recommendations to implement that vision. Following this Introduction, the plan is organized according to the following chapters:

- **Chapter 2 – Key Findings** provides an overview of the technical analysis that contributed to the development of the plan.
- **Chapter 3 – Corridor Planning Principles** describes the principles that were established through the public involvement process and used to guide the creation of the plan.
- **Chapter 4 – A Plan for the Rockville Pike Corridor** describes the key policies of the plan.
- **Chapter 5 – Implementation** outlines a series of implementation steps that will help turn the vision into reality.

In addition to the five chapters, the plan contains two appendices:

- **Appendix A – The Public Process** outlines the major activities of the Rockville's Pike public involvement process.
- **Appendix B - History and Historic Preservation** follows the Pike development from its beginning to the present.

Supplemental research documents are also available but are not included as part of this plan. These documents include:

- **Research Summary** expands on the key findings discussed in Chapter 2, providing more details about the technical analysis that contributed to the plan.
- **Model Sites Analysis** illustrates three conceptual examples of what redevelopment might look like under the plan.
- **Critical Lane Volume Analysis** provides an analysis of available infrastruc-

ture capacity based on the parameters of the City's Comprehensive Transportation Review (CTR) program.

- **Case Studies and Funding Mechanisms** provides transportation and redevelopment case studies as well as a menu of funding mechanisms that have been used in other jurisdictions.